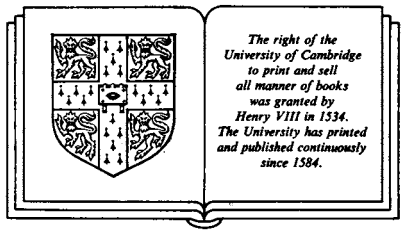
IDEOLOGY, STRATEGY AND PARTY CHANGE: SPATIAL ANALYSES OF POST-WAR ELECTION PROGRAMMES IN 19 DEMOCRACIES

Edited by

IAN BUDGE, DAVID ROBERTSON
DEREK HEARL

Department of Government, University of Essex
and St Hugh's College, University of Oxford



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CHAPTER 1

THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTION PROGRAMMES: BRITAIN AND CANADA 1956–1979

1.1 PURPOSES OF THE ANALYSIS

Most of this book is concerned with the 'internal' analysis of election programmes – the examination, that is, of the concerns and emphases which parties write into their text and which distinguish them from other parties. In Chapter 2 we discuss the background and design of this type of research; Chapters 3–17 apply it to individual countries; and Chapter 18 extends it in a truly comparative, cross-national direction.

The first question people ask in this regard is not, however, what do election programmes tell you about parties, but how far do they get implemented in government? It is the essence of theories of representative democracy that parties gain power on the basis of election pledges which they then have a 'mandate' to put into effect (Kavanagh, 1980). If they do not do this, the usual justifications of the system of government would not apply; electors are being defrauded; the system is not functioning as a sensitive way of translating popular preferences into action.

A full investigation of the relationship between programmatic commitments and government reactions is possible only on the basis of an extended examination of what the commitments are and how they are expressed. The bulk of our book describes this preliminary, but essential, investigation. On its basis we are currently examining relationships with (single-party) government policy (Rallings, Budge and Hearl (eds.), 1987) and with coalition government programmes (Laver, Budge and Hearl (eds.), 1987).

Textual analysis is essential to research on the impact of the programmes, but we, like most people, would feel that large investment here is only worthwhile if the programmes have some external impact.

Such a chicken and egg situation is quite typical of political research. To some extent we have to proceed to textual analysis on faith. Some

indication of external impact however can be given through a study of two countries – Britain and Canada – where it is more reasonable than elsewhere, given the nature of their party systems, to assume that a winning party will be able to do what it has said it wants to do. To make the check more clear-cut, we have confined the study to definite 'pledges' committing parties to some sort of action, rather than extending it to the more general 'emphases' examined elsewhere in the book. If these do not produce action there is little likelihood that other, less binding, statements will.

This chapter, therefore, constitutes a 'strongest-case' analysis, designed to allay some but not all doubts about the governmental impact of election programmes. If none were discernible under these very favourable conditions we should obviously have to think again. If some are found, this says nothing about a less favourable situation (under a strong federal structure for example or perpetual government coalitions). But it does provide a stimulus for more intensive, extended investigation of the type we are now undertaking. Hence the importance of this comparative 'pilot study' to the rest of our analysis.

1.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

In examining implementation in Britain and Canada we shall concentrate on the period 1945–1979. In 1945 the post-war elections held in each country produced majority party governments; 1979 marked the electoral rejection of two administrations with only a tenuous majority. In the interim, ten elections were held in Britain – nine producing a Government with an overall majority in the House of Commons, and seven resulting in a Parliament whose life exceeded three and a half years. Parties understandably assert that election pledges can only be fulfilled 'over the lifetime of a Parliament'. In Canada in the same period there were eleven elections – though here only six Parliaments lasted longer than three years. Moreover, governments in Canada face two other constraints on their ability to carry out their platform promises. In four out of eleven cases they lacked an overall parliamentary majority, and the federal nature of the Canadian constitution means that many potential policy changes have to be the subject of prior negotiation and often compromise with the Provincial authorities. However, on matters clearly within federal jurisdiction and when a parliamentary majority does exist, Canadian governments are well able to legislate.

Differences between their unitary and federal structures notwithstanding, British and Canadian parliamentary systems produce both 'party manifestos' and annual statements of governmental legislative intentions. These 'speeches from the throne' – read in Britain by the monarch and in

Canada by the Governor-General – can be used as a check on whether manifesto commitments actually reach the Government's putative legislative programme. The inclusion of a particular commitment in the Queen's Speech may simply be cosmetic, but Burton and Drewry argue that 'it would seem fair to regard the Queen's Speech as the Government's shop window where its major policy aspirations are displayed. It follows that the "success" or "failure" of a government's . . . programme can be accurately gauged by analysing the products of the Queen's Speech' (Burton and Drewry, 1970 p. 310). Thus we can trace policies from their initial appearance in party platforms to their formal articulation in the speech from the throne, and beyond this to their eventual enactment. We can then see how far they survive or fall at each stage.

Thus we shall analyse the manifestos of the winning parties at each relevant election in Britain and Canada and calculate – through an examination of throne speeches, Acts of Parliament, economic statistics and executive action – the number of pledges they fulfill during their period of office. Actually determining what is and what is not a 'pledge', and whether or not it is met, presents problems. In the first place we shall be interested only in specific commitments to act, and thus will exclude from consideration rather vague general policy statements such as 'we will continue to support the Atlantic alliance' and such regular and formalistic announcements as 'estimates will be laid before you'. However, even particular commitments can be of different kinds and weight. It is difficult to justify a mode of analysis which ranks any given pledge as of higher priority or as more important or controversial than any other. But nonetheless an intention to introduce an annual Wealth Tax, has different implications from a promise to raise old age pensions. Manifesto commitments also differ in the extent to which they can be effected. A 'promise' to reduce the level of unemployment is a firm pledge and of a different order from the pious intent to pursue 'an economy based on more jobs' (Conservative Manifesto, Britain 1970). But it is also something about which the government may simply be unable to take effective action. It seems likely that manifestos which contain a high proportion of 'large' policy intentions will be less fully implemented than those which concentrate on smaller, but more readily achievable, aims.

We also need to define the 'implementation' of a pledge. Often a Government legislates a manifesto commitment and then finds enforcing it easier said than done. In Britain, for example, the Equal Pay Act of 1970 had not been fully adhered to in every sector of industry by 1982. In this preliminary study, it is impossible to deal adequately with the complications raised by such differences between 'outputs' and 'outcomes'. It seems reasonable to say that appropriate legislation or action equals the effective fulfillment of a pledge and that that is the limit to which a

TABLE 1.1

NUMBER OF SPECIFIC PLEDGES IN BRITISH MANIFESTOS AND CANADIAN PLATFORMS 1945-1974

BRITAIN			CANADA		
1945	LAB	18	1945	LIB	7
1950	LAB	15	1949	LIB	19
1951	CONS	15	1953	LIB	7
1955	CONS	20	1957	CONS	16
1959	CONS	33	1958	CONS	5
1964	LAB	50	1962	CONS	8
1966	LAB	47	1963	LIB	33
1970	CONS	52	1965	LIB	14
1974 FEB.	LAB	43	1968	LIB	39
1974 OCT.	LAB	57	1972	LIB	1[x]
			1974	LIB	20
	AVERAGE	35	AVERAGE		15.3
	LABOUR	38.3	LIBERAL		17.5
	CONSERVATIVE	30	CONSERVATIVE		9.7

[x] ONLY ONE FIRM PLEDGE IDENTIFIABLE IN A SMALL BROADSHEET REVIEWING THE LIBERAL GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS FROM 1968.

SOURCES: FOR BRITAIN, F.W.S. CRAIG 1975a
FOR CANADA, D. CARRIGAN 1968 AND LEAFLETS SUPPLIED BY W. IRVINE.

Government's (or party's) responsibility can run. Similarly one cannot really count as a pledge those instances where a party manifesto asserts a desire to 'try to do '*x*' or to achieve '*y*' as soon as practicable', for in neither case is failure to deliver reneging on a firm commitment. Difficulties of interpretation also surround those rare, but significant occasions where a government fulfills a pledge only to undo it later. Here we simply use the situation at the end of a government as a bench-mark against which to measure success or failure in implementing its manifesto.

Our rather tight definitions produce fewer 'pledges' in each manifesto than other scholars have discovered (Rose 1980), p. 62; Finer 1975). Although certain stated aims are ignored as too vague, virtually all manifestos contain a large number of clear pledges whose implementation through executive or parliamentary action is both possible and analysable.

1.3 INITIAL ANALYSIS

The actual number of pledges has risen fairly consistently in Britain from 18 in 1945 to 57 in October 1974, and in Canada reached a peak of 39 iin 1968 as compared with 7 in 1945. Obviously the growth in the scope of governmental activity since the Second World War has played an important part. Edward Heath may also have been correct in commenting that 'people today are so cynical and sceptical about the whole machinery of government that detail is needed to convince them that you really intend to carry out your promise', (quoted in King, 1972). Formal party platforms in Canada have not increased in either size or number of firm commitments so consistently as their British counterparts, and it is clear from the description of formatting in Chapter 4 that their type and origin has varied considerably over this period. However, although the Liberal leader was moved to comment in 1949 that each and every plank in his party's manifesto could only be implemented 'when and if feasible' (Carrigan 1968), p. 167), there is a surprising similarity in the degree to which the pledges made in these documents are fulfilled, in both countries (see Tables 1.6 and 1.7).

If manifestos are increasing in length, what effect has this had on the kind of topic with which they concern themselves? In Britain the economy has unsurprisingly remained as the issue attracting most attention in the programmes of both parties of government (see Table 1.2). Individual topics within this broad area – inflation, unemployment, industrial relations or whatever – have all at one time or another since 1945 been a consuming interest of both government and public opinion and thus obvious candidates for pledges. The changing nature of government involvement in society is reflected in the increasing attention given to environmental and health and social security issues.

The economy, as can be seen from Table 1.3, is an important area of concern to Canadian political parties too, but the actual number of pledges varies considerably – perhaps because of a lower level of direct government involvement. This, together with the responsibility taken for many such matters by Provincial governments, also explains the lesser emphasis on 'Welfare State' issues. Agriculture, on the other hand, attracts more specific attention in Canada than in Britain, and the prominence of Internal Affairs in the 1968 Liberal manifesto is a reflection of the topicality of constitutional issues at that time. It is interesting that the distribution of pledges by subject is roughly equivalent to the overall distribution of themes and emphases measured in Chapters 3 and 4 by coding all statements in the programmes. Parties clearly feel under some obligation to make promises of action on those matters to which they have given general prominence in their election manifestos.

TABLE 1.2

PLEDGES BY SUBJECT MATTER - BRITAIN 1945 - 1974

	1945	1950	1951	1955	1959	1964	1966	1970	FEB. 1974	OCT. 1974
ECONOMY/TRADE/INDUSTRY/ EMPLOYMENT	7	10	8	5	8	16	13	14	20	21
ENVIRONMENT/HOUSING/ LOCAL GOVERNMENT	3	3	2	5	8	11	12	8	7	8
HOME OFFICE	0	2	2	4	4	5	9	11	0	9
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY	4	0	0	2	3	5	3	8	8	11
EDUCATION	2	0	0	4	6	9	7	6	3	4
FOREIGN/DEFENCE	2	0	1	0	1	4	2	3	4	2
AGRICULTURE	0	0	2	0	3	0	1	2	1	2

SOURCE: AS FOR TABLE 1.1

TABLE 1.3

PLEDGES BY SUBJECT MATTER - CANADA 1945 - 1974

	1945	1949	1953	1957	1958	1962	1963	1965	1968	1972	1974
ECONOMY/TRADE INDUSTRY/EMPLOYMENT	3	4	0	10	0	3	11	0	4	1	7
ENVIRONMENT/HOUSING	1	5	1	0	1	3	2	1	6	0	4
INTERNAL AFFAIRS - AND FED. - PROVINCIAL RELATIONS	0	4	3	3	1	0	3	2	13	0	0
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY	3	1	1	3	1	1	8	3	0	0	3
EDUCATION	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	0
AGRICULTURE	0	4	2	0	2	1	4	6	3	0	6
FOREIGN/DEFENCE	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	0	0

SOURCES: AS FOR TABLE 1.1

TABLE 1.4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THRONE SPEECH 'PLEDGES' - BRITAIN

	NUMBER OF INTENTIONS MENTIONED	NUMBER OF INTENTIONS PASSED	%
1945-6	10	9.5	95
1946-7	15	15	100
1947-8	16	14	87.5
1948-9	21	18.5	88
1950	8	7	87.5
1950-1	12	11	91.7
1951-2	7	6	85.7
1952-3	10	9	90
1953-4	18	16	88.9
1954-5	11	6	54.5
1955-6	15	13.5	90
1956-7	13	10.5	80.7
1957-8	15	15	100
1958-9	14	14	100
1959-60	16	13	81.3
1960-61	19	17.5	92.1
1961-62	20	18	90
1962-63	15	15	100
1963-64	24	20	83.3
1964-65	22	17	77.3
1965-66	20	14	70
1966-67	23	22	95.6
1967-68	25	21	84
1968-69	25	22	88
1969-70	32	16	50

Continued...

TABLE 1.4 Continued

1970-71	16	15.5	96.9
1971-72	21	20	95.2
1972-73	18	17	94.4
1973-74	20	10	50
1974	18	8	44.4
1974-75	26	21.5	82.7
1975-76	29	22	75.9
1976-77	19	14.5	76.3
1977-78	22	6	27.3
1978-79	28	14	50

NOTE: AN INTENTION MENTIONED AND PASSED IN THE SAME PARLIAMENTARY SESSION SCORES 1; AN INTENTION MENTIONED IN ONE SPEECH AND PASSED IN A SUBSEQUENT SESSION OF THE SAME PARLIAMENT SCORES .5.

SOURCE: F.W.S. CRAIG, 1975b.

The manifesto pledges, whose number and type we have just analysed, are 'on the table' as soon as their sponsoring party assumes office. Most of them will, in the course of a full Parliament, find their way into the speech from the throne – in other words the Government will serve formal notice of its intention to act. Throne speeches usually contain a fairly heavy legislative programme and many of the Bills outlined are of a technical or highly topical nature, but those pledges that make it this far have a good chance of reaching the Statute book. There is certainly no evidence of governments in either Canada or Britain stating their intentions as a mere cosmetic measure and then letting them drop. Indeed, as Herman (1974) has shown, and as our more extensive and comparative figures confirm, governments in both countries have a general record of success in implementing their legislation – especially when they have a secure Parliamentary majority and a full session at their disposal.

As can be seen from Tables 1.4 and 1.5, British governments have been successful in passing at least 70 per cent of their proposed legislation in four out of every five parliamentary sessions and their Canadian counterparts have achieved the same rate in two out of three. On those occasions in mid-Parliament when this figure is seriously undercut it is usually possible to explain the shortfall by reference to the political situation. In 1977–8 the British Labour Government was seriously constrained by its lack of an

TABLE 1.5

IMPLEMENTATION OF THRONE SPEECH 'PLEDGES' - CANADA

	NUMBER OF INTENTIONS MENTIONED	NUMBER OF INTENTIONS PASSED	%
1945	9	7	77.8
1946	5	4.5	90
1947	7	6.5	92.8
1948	11	9	81.8
1949	21	10	47.6
1949	17	15.5	91.2
1950	23	19	82.6
1950	2	2	100
1951	16	14	87.5
1952	22	19.5	88.6
1952	36	34	94.4
1953	21	20.5	97.6
1955	27	24.5	90.7
1956	20	17	85
1956	2	2	100
1957	11	8	72.7
1957	8	6	75
1958	28	23.5	83.9
1959	31	27	87.1
1960	21	19.5	92.8
1960	19	15.5	81.6
1962	24	13	54.2
1962	30	10	33.3
1963	14	12	85.7
1964	16	10.5	65.6
1965	35	8	22.8

Continued ...

TABLE 1.5 Continued

1966	48	38	79.2
1967	17	8	47
1968	47	40.5	86.2
1969	71	48.5	68.3
1970	68	38	55.9
1972	29	6	20.7
1973	34	19	55.9
1974	46	7	15.2
1974	68	48.5	71.3
1976	21	14.5	69.0
1977	11	4	36.4
1978	15	7	46.7

NOTE: DEFINITIONS AS IN TABLE 1.4

SOURCE: PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD), CANADIAN HOUSE OF COMMONS.

overall majority and the need to enter into a pact with the Liberals; and in Canada the same 1977–8 session, for example, was characterized by Liberal failure to get support for certain controversial constitutional and economic proposals in the Commons.

1.4 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is not of course appropriate for all manifesto pledges to be implemented by specific legislation. Promises to raise social security benefits or to cut taxes, are usually met through action under the auspices of the annual Finance Bill; pledges to initiate a particular project or to alter spending priorities in a particular policy area can be executed through direct government instruction. Yet other types of pledges – to reduce the rate of unemployment or to build a certain number of houses per year – can be effected only through taking measures which it is *hoped* will have the desired outcome.

In such cases we are forced by the difficulty of measuring success, to regard the pledge as unfulfilled. Notwithstanding this very conservative assumption in the analysis, an impressive percentage of pledges are met through the government legislative programme. The British show an average implementation of 63.7 per cent – a figure which rises to 72.7 per cent if the three Parliaments which lasted less than two years are excluded (Table 1.6). Canadian parties in government have been similarly successful

TABLE 1.6

MANIFESTO PLEDGES IMPLEMENTED - BRITAIN

	NUMBER OF PLEDGES	NUMBER IMPLEMENTED	%
1945-50	18	15	83.3
1950-51	15	4	26.7
1951-55	15	12	80
1955-59	20	16	80
1959-64	33	27	81.8
1964-66	50	29	58
1966-70	47	32	68
1970-74	52	34	65.4
1974-74	43	14	32.6
1974-79	57	40	70.2
		AVERAGE:	63.7

TABLE 1.7

MANIFESTO PLEDGES IMPLEMENTED - CANADA

	NUMBER OF PLEDGES	NUMBER IMPLEMENTED	%
1945-49	7	6	85.7
1949-53	20	17	85
1953-57	7	7	100
1957-58	17	9	53
1958-62	5	4	80
1962-63	8	5	62.5
1963-65	33	25	75.7
1965-68	14	10	71.4
1968-72	40	27	67.5
1972-74	1	1	100
1974-79	20	12	60
		AVERAGE:	71.5

in keeping their promises – Table 1.7 shows an average 71.5 per cent of pledges kept. This is surprising since governments in Canada have been shorter with less secure majorities than their British counterparts. But it may reflect the fact that Canadian manifestos have remained more modest and proposed fewer specific measures. This prior recognition of the limitations likely to be imposed by both parliamentary and Federal constraints means that there is little difference in the end, in the degree to which parties in Britain and Canada have fulfilled their commitments to the electorate.

On closer examination though, these broad figures disguise differences in the type of pledge most likely to be carried out. Clear promises to increase pensions and other benefits (often by a named amount) and to repeal ideologically unacceptable legislation passed by a previous administration, are almost invariably kept. Easily-effected pledges, such as appointing a new Minister with particular responsibilities, and minor legislative changes clearly in keeping with a party's general philosophy (e.g. the British Conservatives' promise in 1970 to encourage the sale of council houses), are generally adhered to. A government with an overall parliamentary majority can also hope to legislate on one or perhaps two major and controversial proposals in any given session, but if its manifesto contains too many items of this kind some may well fall by the wayside. For example, the 1974–9 British Labour Government's programme was held up not only by its fragile parliamentary position, but also by the inordinate time required for the Scotland and Wales Act.

The pledges least likely to be fulfilled are the small minority where the government cannot ensure their passage or which involve the expenditure of large amounts of public money on electorally unappealing and/or low priority projects. On a number of occasions Canadian parties have included in their platform a promise to increase overseas aid to a specified level, but this target has never been reached. There will always be manifesto proposals for which sufficient resources can simply not be found during the lifetime of a Parliament – no government has recently been able to avoid financial constraints on its programme as the result of internal or world recession. Finally, governments will sometimes need to go against one of their pledges because of unforeseen and urgent political developments. The 1970–4 Conservative Government's nationalization of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders and Rolls Royce, and its agreement to the large-scale immigration of Ugandan Asians, fall into this category.

Although the overall record of political parties in Britain and Canada is good, the electorates take a less rosy view. Why? The explanation starts with media concentration on economic policy and the 'U-turns' which have been associated with it. It was all very well for Conservative Central Office to claim in 1974 that the Heath Government had implemented 97 of

its 105 manifesto pledges (Rose 1980, p. 66). However, what impinged more heavily on public consciousness was the introduction of a compulsory incomes policy and the failure to reduce price rises 'at a stroke'. Statements like this, however much politicians claim that they are taken out of context, are seized upon by the press and elevated to the status of campaign promises. Inevitably couched in less careful and considered terms than is usual in manifestos themselves, they thus, almost accidentally, become the hostage of a party's fortunes. In fact, clear pledges to act in particular areas of macro-economic policy are rare, and certainly a declaration in favour of the 'maintenance of a high level of employment and national income' does not meet our criteria for a 'pledge'. Nonetheless, such statements leave a general impression of a party's intentions and then it scarcely matters what the manifesto itself actually says (see Watkins 1981). Governments have in recent years failed to meet expectations. Hence they are blamed more for their ineffectiveness in achieving large, vaguely stated, economic and social goals than credited for what is – in objective terms – a solid record of publishing and then implementing a fairly coherent and wide-ranging policy programme.

Some commentators actually argue that 'manifestosis' has gone too far. There is a feeling that programmes are devised to 'bribe' voters and to assuage party activists, and that 'mandates for shopping lists of 60 to 80 specific items are without meaning' (Finer 1975). If what is meant is that voters cannot possibly know, or even care about, each specific pledge, then of course Finer has a point. As we have said electors do judge in terms of general gap between promise and performance rather than against an 'objective' check-list of what has actually been achieved.

Despite this, manifestos are essential to the operationalization of representative democracy. They are 'the only direct and clear statements of party policy available to the electorate and directly attributable to the party as such' (Robertson 1976, p. 72). 'Many citizens (may) vote without knowing what is in the manifesto' (Lord Denning 1981), but the fact that the major political parties have become increasingly 'programmatic' cannot be an accident. They interpret their role as encouraging electoral support not only through their image but also through the articulation of concrete policy proposals. Far better than seeking a blank cheque 'party manifestoes provide voters with a clear-cut choice between teams of politicians with differing intentions about what government should do' (Rose 1974, p. 316). They may on occasion give the impression that governments are omnipotent. However, as long as it is realized that they are important guides to action which must be taken seriously, but which will necessarily also be partial and incomplete, then they surely aid rather than hinder the process of representative government.